DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 442 236 EC 307 874

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TITLE Diploma Decisions for Students with Disabilities: What Parents Need To Know.
INSTITUTION Florida State Dept. of Education, Tallahassee. Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 50p.
AVAILABLE FROM Clearinghouse Information Center, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, Division of Public Schools and Community Education, Florida Department of Education, Room 622, Turlington Building, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400; Tel: 850-488-1879; Fax: 850-487-2679; e-mail: cicbisc@mail.doe.state.fl.us; Web site: http://www.firn.edu/doe/commhome/
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Decision Making; *Disabilities; *Graduation Requirements; High Schools; *Individualized Education Programs; Long Range Planning; Middle Schools; Parent Student Relationship; *Student Educational Objectives; Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Florida; *Individualized Transition Plans

ABSTRACT

This guide for parents of students with disabilities in Florida provides information about the types of diplomas available through the Florida public school system and is intended to help parents and students make diploma choices in middle school and beyond as part of yearly transition individualized education program (IEP) meetings. Part 1 explains the requirements for each diploma option, the pros and cons of each option, and choices for students who do not meet requirements for a diploma. Part 2 explains how to choose the best diploma option for a specific child and the role of parent and student on the transition IEP team. Part 3 describes the steps to be taken each year to ensure that a student earns the most appropriate diploma. Part 4 explains how to learn about changes regarding diploma options and graduation requirements. Six appendices provide additional information including: (1) current graduation requirements for a standard diploma; (2) accommodations and modifications; (3) the Sunshine State Standards for a special diploma; (4) acquiring a diploma by passing the Tests of General Educational Development; (5) samples of rating scales for choosing between diploma options; and (6) additional resources. (Contains 26 references.) (DB)

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Diploma Decisions for Students with Disabilities

What Parents Need to Know

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Diploma Decisions for Students with Disabilities

What Parents Need to Know

Florida Department of Education
Division of Public Schools and Community Education
Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
Reprinted 2000

This product was developed by the Standards and Curriculum for Students with Disabilities Project through the Center for Performance Technology, Florida State University, funded by the State of Florida, Department of Education, Division of Public Schools and Community Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, through federal assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B.

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Diploma Decisions for Students with Disabilities

What Parents Need to Know

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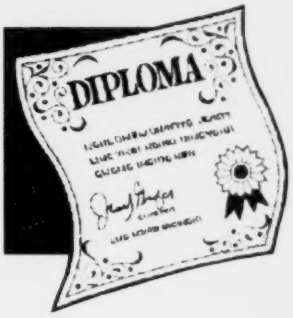
What Is in This Guide?



This guide is designed for parents of students with disabilities. It provides information about types of diplomas available through the Florida public school system. Knowing about these options will help you make sure your child participates in an educational program leading to the appropriate type of diploma. The diploma should help your child achieve his or her goals for life after high school.

It's good to begin thinking about graduation options when your child starts elementary school. The elementary school program lays the foundation for future years. By the end of middle school, you and your child will be asked to make more definite plans about diploma choices. This is not a decision you will have to make on your own. You will be assisted throughout this process by school and district staff.

This guide provides information about making diploma choices in middle school and beyond. The decision to take a course of study leading to a particular type of diploma must first be addressed at the individual educational plan (IEP) meeting conducted during your child's *eighth grade year* or the IEP meeting conducted during the year your child turns age 14. This IEP meeting and the ones that follow in high school are called **transition IEP meetings**. That's because the meetings deal with issues related to making the transition to adult life after high school. Diploma decisions are included in the written **transition IEP**.

Each year in high school, the diploma choice is reviewed at the transition IEP meeting. You and your child are members of the **transition IEP team**. Your child's regular and exceptional student education (ESE) teachers are also part of the team. The transition IEP team may also include other members of the school or district staff, as well as personnel from service agencies in the community. The diploma choice may be adjusted from year to year by the transition IEP team as needed.

How Is This Guide Organized?

This guide is divided into five sections to help you understand the steps along the path to graduation. Each section is briefly described on the next page.

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Part 1, Diploma Options in Florida Schools

Part 1 describes high school diploma options available through the Florida public school system. The requirements for each option are explained. This section also addresses choices for students with disabilities who do not meet requirements for a diploma. The pros and cons of each option are discussed.

Part 2, Choosing the Right Diploma

Part 2 explains how to choose the best diploma option for your child. In this section, you will learn about the role you and your son or daughter play as members of the transition IEP team. You will find out how your input helps shape diploma choice.

Part 3, Planning for Graduation Year by Year

Part 3 describes the steps to take each year, starting in the eighth grade, to insure that your child earns the diploma which best meets his or her needs.

Part 4, A Note about the Future

Part 4 describes how you can learn about changes regarding diploma options and graduation requirements.

Appendices

The appendices contain additional information to help expand your knowledge and understanding of some of the topics discussed in the guide.

How to Use This Guide

This guide may be used in several different ways. Reading the guide from beginning to end provides detailed information about diploma options and graduation requirements. For a quick overview, you can read the charts that summarize the important points in each section. You may also use the Table of Contents to locate specific topics you want to know more about.

Terms Used in This Guide

It's important to become familiar with the vocabulary that is used in the Florida Statutes concerning diplomas and graduation requirements. These terms are printed in **bold type** the first time they appear in the guide. Explanations are provided as needed. Knowing these terms will help you participate more effectively in transition IEP meetings. You will understand more fully what is discussed. You will also be able to better express your opinions about diploma decisions.

Part 1: Diploma Options in Florida Schools

To make sure your child leaves high school with a diploma, it's important to plan for the type of diploma he or she will earn. You will need to help monitor your son or daughter's progress toward that goal and assist school personnel in making changes in the educational program as needed.

Florida offers all students several options regarding the type of diploma they may earn when graduating from high school. In addition to these choices, students with disabilities are eligible to earn a special diploma. In this guide, you will learn how students with disabilities may pursue a **standard diploma** (a regular diploma) or one of two types of **special diplomas**. Choices for students with disabilities who don't earn a diploma in high school will also be discussed.

In this section you will learn about

- The Standard Diploma
- Special Diplomas (Option 1 and Option 2)
- Certificates of Completion
- Earning a Diploma by Passing the GED Tests
- Diploma Options and Desired Post-School Outcomes

The Standard Diploma

The **standard diploma** is the type of high school diploma earned by most students who graduate from Florida high schools. All students, including students with disabilities, are entitled to earn a standard diploma. To do so, they must meet the graduation requirements set by the state and the local school districts.

Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma

The state sets the requirements for a standard diploma to insure that all students are able to perform at a high level when they graduate from high school. However, from district to district, the requirements for a standard diploma vary because school districts may choose to set *higher* requirements for a standard diploma.

The requirements for a standard diploma set by the Florida Legislature are listed on the next page. These requirements apply to students who entered ninth grade in the fall of 1997 or later. You should check with your child's ESE teachers, guidance

counselor, or local school district office to find out if your district has *additional* requirements. For example, the state requires students to earn at least 24 total credits in coursework for graduation. However, in some school districts in Florida, students must earn as many as 28 credit hours to graduate with a standard diploma.

State Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma

In order to graduate with a standard diploma, a student must

- earn at least 24 credit hours in specified coursework, including 15 hours in required subjects (including Algebra I or approved equivalent courses) and 9 credits of electives*
- earn a 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) on an unweighted 4.0 scale
- earn passing scores on all parts of the High School Competency Test (HSCT) or the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). (See "Testing Requirements" on page 5.)
- use Level 1 (low-level) courses to meet graduation requirements only by approval (as defined in district policy)**

* *Note:* Students entering high school as freshmen in the fall of 1999 will be required to earn 15.5 hours in required subjects and 8.5 hours in elective credits.

** Level I courses have lower requirements than most other high school courses.

Course Credit Requirements

The state requires all students to earn at least 15 credit hours in certain *required* courses for a standard diploma. For example, students must earn four credits in English and three credits in math. (For a complete list of required courses see "Appendix A: Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma" on page 31.) For credit towards a standard diploma, the requirements for *basic* (regular academic) courses cannot be changed. Students with disabilities are expected to learn the same things as nondisabled students. However, modifications can be made to requirements for *vocational* courses, as appropriate. (See "Appendix B: Accommodations and Modifications" on page 33.)

Some required courses may be too difficult for your son or daughter. If so, your child *may* be able to use Level I basic courses to meet graduation requirements for required courses. However, the use of a Level I course must be approved in writing by school staff and the parent. Level I courses *cannot* take the place of Algebra I or equivalent courses.

To graduate with a standard diploma, students must also earn at least nine *elective* credits. There are many choices of elective courses. Students may take basic, vocational, and ESE courses for elective credits. Remedial courses may also be used for elective credits.

Testing Requirements

There are also testing requirements that students must meet to earn a standard diploma. Students who are already in high school must earn passing scores on all parts of the High School Competency Test (HSCT). The HSCT measures students' basic skills in communications and mathematics. It is first given in grade 11. If students with disabilities fail to pass the HSCT, they may retake the test during regularly scheduled testing periods as needed.

Students who enter high school as freshmen in the fall of 1999 or later will not take the HSCT. Instead, they will be required to pass all parts of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) to earn a standard diploma. The FCAT is part of a statewide testing program that measures what students should know and be able to do. The FCAT tests reading and mathematics. It is given in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10. A passing score will be required on the tenth grade FCAT for a standard diploma. If students with disabilities fail to pass the FCAT, they may retake the tenth-grade version of the test during regularly scheduled testing times as needed. Students who are in *tenth grade* in the 1999-2000 school year may be exempt from taking one or both parts of the HSCT if they achieve the required scores on the FCAT.

Accommodations for a Standard Diploma

Your child's ESE teachers or guidance counselor can give you more information about the requirements for a standard diploma. Keep in mind that **accommodations** may be provided for basic courses and tests to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Accommodations change the *way* a student learns, but not *what* the student is expected to learn. The transition IEP team determines appropriate accommodations for your child. Examples of accommodations include

- using instructional tools that make it possible for students with disabilities to perform the skills (such as using a talking calculator to solve math problems)
- adjusting time demands and schedules (such as allowing more time to finish assignments and courses)
- making changes in the learning environment (such as providing a workstation suited to a wheelchair)
- making changes to classroom assignments or tests (such as reading science test questions out loud)

Accommodations may also be provided for the HSCT, FCAT, and other state and classroom tests. These accommodations are identified by the transition IEP team. (See "Appendix B: Accommodations and Modifications," beginning on page 33, for more information.)

Students with disabilities who have not earned a standard diploma may stay in school until they are 22 years old. This also applies to students with disabilities who have been awarded a special diploma, certificate of completion, or special certificate of completion before they turned 22. The district must continue to offer services until the student is 22 years old or until the student earns a standard diploma, whichever comes first. This is a new policy that is included in the *1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*.

Special Diploma Options

Special diploma options offer choices to students with disabilities who are not able to meet the requirements for a standard diploma. The state provides general guidelines for special diploma options. More specific requirements are set by each school district.

Two special diploma options are available for students with disabilities. All school districts in Florida *must* offer **Special Diploma Option 1**. They may *choose* to offer **Special Diploma Option 2**. Most Florida school districts currently offer Special Diploma Option 2. Check with your local school district office to determine if Option 2 is available in your district.

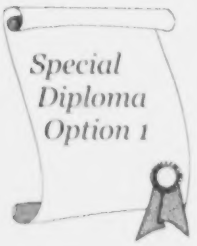
Who May Earn a Special Diploma?

Special diplomas are available to certain students with disabilities who have been properly identified as

- specific learning disabled
- emotionally handicapped
- educable mentally handicapped
- trainable mentally handicapped
- deaf or hard-of-hearing
- physically impaired
- language impaired
- profoundly handicapped (profoundly mentally handicapped, dual sensory impaired, autistic, and severely emotionally disturbed)

Students who are identified solely as visually impaired or speech impaired are not eligible for a special diploma. To be eligible, they must also have another identified disability.

Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 1



The graduation requirements for Special Diploma Option 1 are described in the box below. To earn Special Diploma Option 1, students must earn the number of course credits specified by the local school board. The course credits may be earned by taking exceptional student education (ESE) classes and/or basic (regular academic) or vocational classes.

Students currently in high school must also master the Student Performance Standards at the levels required by the state for each disability area (or a higher level if required by the local school board). The Student Performance Standards describe minimum performance requirements for reading, language, mathematics, and social/personal skills. These standards are in effect for students who entered ninth grade before the fall of 1999.

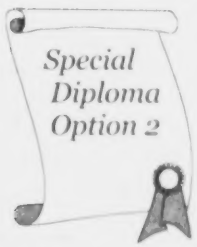
New standards, called the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma, are required for students entering ninth grade in 1999-2000 and after. (See "Appendix C: The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma" on page 37 for additional information.)

State Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 1

In order to graduate with Special Diploma Option 1, a student must

- earn the minimum number of course credits, defined by the district school board (Credits may be earned in basic, vocational, or exceptional student education classes.)
- master the Student Performance Standards developed by the state for each disability or the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma

Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 2



Requirements for Special Diploma Option 2 are based on mastery of a set of competencies developed for each individual student related to employment and community living. These competencies are specified in the student's employment and community competencies training plan. The state graduation requirements for Special Diploma Option 2 are listed in the box on the next page. Notice that Option 2 is *not* based on course credits or mastery of the state-developed Student Performance Standards or the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.

State Graduation Requirements for Special Diploma Option 2

In order to graduate with Special Diploma Option 2, a student must

- be successfully employed in the community for a minimum period of one semester, at or above minimum wage
- achieve all annual goals and short-term objectives related to employment and community competencies in the transition individual educational plan (IEP)
- demonstrate mastery of competencies in his or her employment and community competencies training plan

For Option 2, the state requires a student to be successfully employed at or above minimum wage for at least one semester. However, a school district may require a student to be employed for a longer period of time to insure success. The specific goals, objectives, and competencies required for each individual student are planned at the district and school level. Additional requirements may be defined by each school district.

Certificates of Completion

With careful planning and monitoring of progress, the majority of students with disabilities will earn a standard or special diploma. However, some students may complete the required high school courses but fail to meet all of the graduation requirements for a diploma. Students who are unable to meet graduation requirements for a diploma may receive a **certificate of completion.** *A certificate of completion is not a diploma.* It certifies that a student attended high school but did *not* meet all graduation requirements for a diploma.

Two types of certificates of completion are available.

- A regular **certificate of completion** may be given to *any* student pursuing a standard diploma who passes the required courses in high school but fails to pass the High School Competency Test (HSCT) or achieve the required grade point average. *Students with disabilities who are eligible for a regular certificate of completion have the option of graduating with Special Diploma Option 1 instead.*

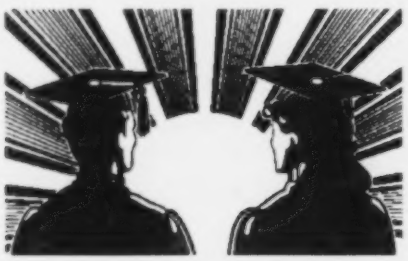
- A **special certificate of completion** is available to *students with disabilities* who are unable to meet all of the graduation requirements for a special diploma. The special certificate of completion certifies that the student passed the required ESE courses in high school, but failed to master the Student Performance Standards for Exceptional Student Education or the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.

Earning a Diploma by Passing the GED Tests

Students who have not earned a standard diploma in high school may pursue other avenues to earn one. Students may attempt to earn a high school diploma (or its equivalent) by passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED). Preparation classes for the GED tests are offered through local adult education programs.

The GED tests consist of separate tests in the areas of English, social studies, science, literature, and mathematics. The tests are written on a ninth-grade reading level. Students are required to determine content errors in written text on the English test. They must also write a 200-word essay. The mathematics test measures problem-solving skills in arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. In Florida, the GED tests are available in English and Spanish. Special editions of the tests are available in large print and braille, and on audiocassette. Students must be 18 years old to take the GED tests. (See "Appendix D: Acquiring a Diploma by Passing the Tests of General Education Development (GED)" on page 39 for additional information.)

Diploma Options and Desired Post-School Outcomes



When making diploma decisions, it's important to think about your child's **desired post-school outcomes**. What does he or she want to do after high school? Where and how does your son or daughter plan to live, be employed, spend leisure time, and engage in social relationships three to five years after he or she leaves school? This information will help the transition IEP team begin to think about what type of diploma will be required to meet these post-school goals. Earning a particular type of diploma or certificate of completion will have a direct impact on what doors are open to your son or daughter.

This section addresses the requirements for some of the post-school outcomes that your son or daughter may wish to pursue, including

- employment
- military service
- postsecondary education

As you read this section, be aware that there are often *exceptions* to general policies, depending on the individual student and the situation. *You will need to investigate further to determine specific local requirements for employment, the military, and postsecondary programs in your community.* You can ask your child's ESE teachers or guidance counselor for help. Or you may call military recruiters or admission offices of schools yourself. It is important to get the answers to your questions *before* making any final decisions regarding the diploma your child will earn.

Employment

If your son or daughter plans to get a job right after leaving high school, you should consider the following:

- All types of diplomas can lead to permanent employment. Successful completion of a high school program is an important achievement. High school transcripts indicate the names and numbers of courses and the grades earned and whether or not the student was eligible for graduation.

- Students pursuing Special Diploma Option 2 are employed as part of their employment and community competencies training plan and may be able to stay in the same job when they graduate. Parents can receive assistance in finding a job for their child and providing transportation.

- Certificates of completion are *not* diplomas and are not accepted as diplomas by employers. Many students with certificates of completion are able to get jobs. However, the type of employment may be limited to unskilled service jobs or manual labor and opportunities for advancement may be restricted.

Military Service

The requirements for each branch of the military (Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard) are somewhat different. In general, you should know the following:

- Acceptance into the military is based heavily on the score the student makes on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).

- The military requires a high school diploma for admission. A standard diploma is preferred, but a diploma earned by passing the GED tests may be accepted. However, a student with a GED diploma may be required to meet additional requirements (such as make a particular cut-off score on the ASVAB).

- Special diplomas may or may not be accepted by military recruiters.

When considering the military, always check with your local recruiters for the most up-to-date information. Admission standards may change depending on how great the need is for recruits. In addition, individual capabilities of the applicant may be taken into account.

Postsecondary Education Goals

If your child would like to continue his or her education after high school, there are a variety of options to consider.

Vocational Schools

Vocational schools train adult students in a particular trade (such as plumbing or computer technology). The admission requirements and length of time to complete each program vary. Students wishing to attend a vocational school should know these facts:

- Depending on the vocational school and the particular program, students *may or may not* need a standard diploma for admission.
- Students may be required to take a test of basic skills to show that they have the academic skills needed to benefit from the vocational training.

Community Colleges

Community colleges offer programs leading to two-year degrees. They may also offer vocational programs. The state sets minimum admissions requirements for community colleges.

For *programs leading to two-year degrees* the following requirements usually apply.

- Students who leave high school with standard diplomas are eligible for acceptance into community colleges. Students with diplomas earned by passing the GED tests are also accepted.
- Students with special diplomas or certificates of completion are not generally eligible for admission to community colleges. However, they *may* be allowed to pursue up to 12 credit hours on a provisional basis as nondegree-seeking students while working to pass the GED tests.

For *vocational programs* in community colleges the following requirements usually apply.

- Students *may or may not* need a standard diploma for admission.
- Students may be required to take a test of basic skills to show they have the academic skills needed to benefit from the vocational training.

Check with the individual community college to determine local requirements and identify any special programs. Contact the school's coordinator for programs and services for students with disabilities. This person can answer your questions and assist your son or daughter in many ways.

State Universities

Is your son or daughter hoping to attend a four-year state university following high school? As with community colleges, you should seek information from the university's coordinator for programs and services for students with disabilities. Four-year universities may have higher admission requirements than community colleges.

- Standard diplomas (or GED diplomas) are usually required for admission.
- There are additional entrance requirements regarding grade point averages and scores on college entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT). Accommodations are allowed on these exams for students with disabilities.

Private Colleges and Universities

Private colleges and universities are not governed by the State University System's admission requirements. Contact the admissions office at each college for information regarding the specific entrance requirements for that institution.

Weighing the Pros and Cons of Diploma Options

Earning a standard diploma offers students the most options following high school. However, the high requirements for a standard diploma may make it difficult for some students to attain. The chart on the next page summarizes information about diplomas and certificates of completion. You can use this chart to help you make decisions by comparing the pros and cons of the various choices.

Pluses and Minuses of Diploma Options and Certificates of Completion

Option	What It Certifies	Pluses and Minuses
Standard Diploma	Certifies that the student has met the state and district requirements for a standard diploma (course work, test scores, and grade point average)	+ Recognized by employers + Accepted by vocational schools and colleges + Recognized by military recruiters – Higher standards may make attainment difficult for some students
Special Diploma Option 1	Certifies mastery of ESE Student Performance Standards or Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma and district courses	+ Is a high school diploma + Recognized by employers + Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma – May not be accepted by vocational schools – Not usually accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment) – May not be accepted by military recruiters
Special Diploma Option 2	Certifies mastery of employment and community survival skills	+ Is a high school diploma + Student may continue employment after graduation + Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma – Not available in some school districts – May not be accepted by vocational schools – Not usually accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment) – May not be accepted by military recruiters
Certificate of Completion	Certifies that the student passed the required courses in high school but failed to pass the High School Competency Test (HSCT) or achieve the required grade point average	+ Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma – Not a high school diploma – May not be accepted by vocational schools – Not accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment) – Not accepted by military recruiters – Not recognized by employers
Special Certificate of Completion	Certifies that the student passed the required ESE courses in high school, but failed to master the Student Performance Standards or Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma	+ Student may continue to work toward a standard diploma – Not a high school diploma – May not be accepted by vocational schools – Not accepted by community colleges (may allow provisional enrollment) – Not accepted by military recruiters – Not recognized by employers

Part 2: Choosing the Right Diploma

In this section you will learn about choosing and earning a diploma that best suits your child's abilities, interests, and post-graduation plans. The following topics are addressed:

- Choosing a Diploma–An Overview
- Strategies for Making the Best Diploma Choice
- Moving between Diploma Options

Choosing a Diploma–An Overview

The path to choosing a diploma actually starts in elementary school. It's wise to get information about diploma options during the elementary school years. Ask your child's ESE teacher or the school guidance counselor how the educational program, placement, and services your child receives during the elementary years will affect diploma decisions made in middle and high school.

Near the end of middle school, you and your child will have an opportunity to plan the courses he or she will take in high school. In doing so, you will need to make your first formal decisions about the type of diploma your son or daughter plans to earn.

Choosing a Diploma and Planning the Appropriate Course of Study

The decision whether to take a course of study leading to a standard diploma or to a special diploma must first be addressed at the transition individual educational plan (transition IEP) meeting conducted during your child's *eighth grade year* or the transition IEP meeting conducted during the year your child turns age 14, whichever comes first. Beginning with this first transition IEP meeting, your son or daughter must be invited to participate in each transition IEP meeting in the years to come.

At this meeting, the transition IEP team, which includes you and your child, works together to decide whether a standard or special diploma is the best choice for your child. The team also plans appropriate courses of study (such as basic courses, vocational courses, ESE courses). The team identifies any special accommodations and modifications needed to help your son or daughter participate fully in the educational program. All decisions made are documented on the transition IEP. This information helps guide your child's educational program as he or she enters high school.

Choosing between Special Diploma Option 1 and Option 2

If the transition IEP team agrees on a special diploma, the team may choose Option 1 or 2 (if Option 2 is offered in your school district). The choice between the two types of special diplomas is often not made until the ninth or tenth grade. By this time your child may have a clearer picture of what he or she would like to do following graduation and may be old enough to be employed.

If the transition IEP team decides on Special Diploma Option 2, the team creates an individualized employment and community competencies training plan for your child. This plan states exactly what your child must learn and do in terms of his employment and course of study to earn the diploma.

Reviewing Diploma and Coursework Decisions Annually

Diploma choices may be revisited at any time and must *always* be reviewed at transition IEP meetings throughout the high school years. Your son or daughter's needs, interests, preferences, abilities, and desired post-school outcomes may change over time. Decisions regarding diploma choice, course of study, and accommodations must be reviewed annually at the transition IEP meeting. The transition IEP team then makes changes as needed.

It's important to think carefully about diploma decisions. Changing diploma choices may require more time for your son or daughter to complete graduation requirements. (See "Moving Between Diploma Options" beginning on page 19 for additional information.)

Strategies for Making the Best Diploma Choice

The key to making a diploma choice is to match your child's strengths and long-term interests with the diploma option. The diploma is useful only if it meets the needs of your son or daughter.

The following strategies can be used to help insure a good match between the student and the diploma choice:

1. **Review all available information regarding the student's progress.**

   When making the diploma decision, review all available information to create a realistic picture of your child's abilities, interests, and likely post-school goals. Some valuable sources of information are listed below:

   - assessment records (such as classroom tests, standardized tests, teacher observations, work samples, career assessments)
   - prior IEPs and transition IEPs

- teacher reports
- input from you and your son or daughter, including information about his or her goals for employment and adult living

The transition IEP team members will need to answer a number of questions, such as the following:

- How has the student performed in the educational program up to now?
- How has the student performed in regular education classes?
- What do the student's recent test scores indicate?
- What does the student *want to do* and *have the capability to do* after high school? What type of diploma will help the student achieve these desired post-school goals?

2. Make sure you and your child participate actively in the process.

You and your son or daughter play an important role in the transition IEP team. You can provide useful information that teachers and other educators may not have access to. Some of the steps you can take to prepare for and participate actively in the meeting are described below.

Preparing for Transition IEP Meetings

Prior to Each Transition IEP Meeting

- Ask the school to provide you and your child with information regarding
  - your child's progress in school
  - topics that will be addressed at the meeting
  - what will be documented on the transition IEP
- Talk with your child to help identify his or her personal interests and feelings regarding the educational program and desired post-school outcomes. Help your son or daughter learn about possible educational and career opportunities.
- Make notes regarding information you would like to share at the meeting or questions you would like to have answered. Encourage your child to do the same.
- Bring any recent evaluations completed outside of school to the meeting.

At the Transition IEP Meeting

- Share your views regarding future learning goals appropriate for your child and encourage your child to share his or her views. Be prepared to discuss desired post-school outcomes (Where and how does your child want to live, be employed, spend leisure time, and engage in social relationships three to five years after leaving school?). This information will help the team begin to think about what type of diploma will be required to meet these post-school goals.
- Carefully review your child's records and previous IEPs or transition IEPs with the other team members. This will help the team determine what has already been accomplished and what might need to be achieved in the future to enable your child to attain his or her desired post-school goals.
- Ask questions to clarify any information that you do not understand.

3. If the diploma decision is unclear, use rating scales, questionnaires, or other instruments to help focus team input.

Sometimes the diploma choice is evident to the members of the transition IEP team. In other situations, the decision may not be so clear. Transition IEP teams may use rating scales, questionnaires, and other instruments to help team members review critical factors that affect diploma choice. These instruments are not meant to provide the final answer, but they often help to point the way. (See "Appendix E: Samples of Rating Scales for Choosing between Diploma Options" beginning on page 41.)

4. Choose a standard diploma when in doubt.

In making the initial diploma decision, it is important to aim high. Give the student every opportunity to achieve his or her best. The transition IEP team should select the standard diploma if it is not clear whether a standard or a special diploma is most appropriate. Then, during the ninth grade, teachers and parents can keep a close watch on the student's progress. They should consider the following questions:

- Is the student attending school regularly and trying hard?
- Is he or she receiving appropriate accommodations and assistance in school?
- Is the student having a lot of problems or failing?

If the answer to all of these questions is yes, the IEP team may need to consider a special diploma.

5. **When deciding between Special Diploma Options 1 and 2, carefully consider your child's post-school goals and whether he or she would benefit from full-time employment.**

   For students who function well in the school environment, Special Diploma Option 1 may be the best choice. Option 1 is academically based. However, it also provides opportunities for students to learn and practice real-world employment and community survival skills.

   Consider Special Diploma Option 2 if your child is not interested in the school program and plans to go to work right after graduation. With Special Diploma Option 2, students are placed in full-time jobs while still in school. Students often continue in these jobs when they graduate.

   When considering Option 2, think about how your child will get to and from a job each day. Ask your child's ESE teachers about transportation services available in your district. Your child may qualify for assistance with transportation.

Moving between Diploma Options

The diploma choice is reviewed annually at the transition IEP meeting, and the transition IEP team may change the diploma selection if needed. *However, a switch of diploma options late in a student's high school career may mean additional time in school in either regular session or summer school.* It's important that you and your son or daughter understand this early in the process.

Each school district must develop ways for students to select and move between standard or special diplomas and between the special diploma options. General requirements for moving between diploma options are described on the following page.

Requirements for Moving between Diploma Options*

Moving from Standard to Special Diploma	◆ A student may switch from a standard diploma to Special Diploma Option 1 and receive credit toward a special diploma for passing basic (regular) education courses. ◆ A student who changes from standard diploma to Special Diploma Option 2 must still master all employment and community competencies specified in the student's training plan, regardless of the number and type of credits previously earned.
Moving from Special Diploma (Option 1 or Option 2) to Standard Diploma	◆ Students may switch from Special Diploma Option 1 or 2 to a standard diploma and receive elective credit toward a standard diploma for passing ESE courses. ◆ Nine elective credits may be counted toward graduation requirements for a standard diploma.
Moving between Special Diploma Options 1 and 2	◆ Students in Special Diploma Option 2 are enrolled in and earning credits for ESE courses. If they wish to change to Option 1, these credits may be applied toward the requirements for Option 1. ◆ If a student has been pursuing Option 1 and wishes to change to Option 2, an employment and community competencies training plan will be developed. The student must master all employment and community competencies, regardless of the number and type of credits previously earned.

**Note.* From *Let's Try Another Way: Implementing Special Diploma Option 2* (pp. 8-10), by Florida Department of Education, 1995, Tallahassee, FL: Author. Copyright 1995 by State of Florida. Adapted with permission.

Part 3: Planning for Graduation Year by Year

In order to reach the desired goal–*graduation*–your child needs to make choices and plans starting in eighth grade and continuing through the high school years.

Things to Consider in Eighth Grade

As your child completes his or her last year of middle school there are a number of important things to consider. They are described in detail in this section.

During the eighth grade, each student with disabilities should do the following:

- Make the first formal statement about diploma choice.
- Plan for high school.
- Develop self-determination skills.
- Explore a variety of career options.
- Develop school survival skills.

Making the First Formal Statement about Diploma Choice

As described earlier, your child makes his or her first formal statement about diploma choice and course of study at the transition IEP meeting which occurs in the eighth grade or the year he or she turns 14. The IEP team helps your child plan his or her **course of study**. The team works together to determine the kinds of courses your child needs to take in high school to earn the diploma he or she is pursuing.

Your son or daughter plays an active role in selecting the diploma. Your child should express his or her interests and desires regarding preferred post-school goals and help plan for the diploma chosen. The diploma choice and course of study will be revisited annually and may be changed as needed. (See "Moving between Diploma Options" beginning on page 19 for additional information.)

Developing a Plan for High School

Eighth graders should begin to plan the high school courses and experiences they will need to reach their post-school goals. Some districts provide planning guides or folders that support this process. If yours does not, you and your child may want to keep a planning folder or portfolio at home.

The planning folder may include a summary of your child's likes and dislikes, strongest and weakest school performance areas, and ways he or she learns best. It may contain a statement of desired post-school outcomes. It may also list the courses he or she must take in high school. The courses on the list will depend on the type of diploma selected. The diploma and courses chosen should be based on your child's capabilities and post-school goals.

Your child may revise and add to the information in the planning folder each year in high school as needed. By the end of your child's high school career, the folder should contain information about all the classes, extracurricular activities, job experiences, and other relevant experiences that he or she has had in high school. Information in this folder may then be used when applying to or requesting assistance in college or when determining necessary accommodations on a job.

(Note: An education and career planning folder called *Pathways to Your Future* is available though the Florida Department of Education Products Catalog. See "Appendix F: Resources" on page 45 for ordering information.)

Developing Self-Determination Skills

Students with disabilities should learn and apply **self-determination skills** throughout middle and high school. Self-determination involves taking control and making decisions that affect one's life. Transition IEP meetings provide an ideal environment for your child to practice self-determination skills. He or she plays an active role in choosing post-school goals, making choices about diploma type, and planning courses of study.

Your son or daughter's school may offer special training in self-determination skills. In addition, many ESE courses provide opportunities for teachers to assist students in developing these skills. This type of training helps students know their strengths and understand their legal rights. It also helps them be more active participants in planning their futures.

Exploring a Variety of Career Options

When your child considers desired post-school outcomes and makes appropriate diploma choices, it is helpful for him or her to know about a variety of careers. Ideally, all students should have an exploratory vocational or career education course before they leave eighth grade. Students also benefit from completing career assessment activities. If these opportunities aren't available through your school district, consider joining with other parents to persuade the principal or district staff that this is very important for all students.

Sometimes arranging for career or vocational education is not possible. However, you can find other ways for your son or daughter to explore careers. For example, you and your child might take the following steps:

- Find self-scoring interest/aptitude inventories in the public library.
- Visit places where different kinds of jobs are being done.
- Do volunteer work in the community.
- Participate in job fairs in other schools or in the community.
- Visit a vocational or career counselor.
- Ask your school guidance counselor for help in locating additional information about careers.

When gathering information about jobs, ask questions and get the information you need. The main things you want to find out include:

- What does a person in a job like this really do?
- What kind of training is required to do the job?
- What basic skills (such as reading, writing, and math) are required?
- Is this job something my son or daughter seems *interested* in, might *like* to do, and would be *able* to do?

The more you and your child learn about potential careers, the more able he or she will be to make appropriate plans for graduation and beyond.

Developing School Survival Skills

Developing school survival skills helps students maximize their ability to learn in middle and high school. Students should begin developing school survival skills in middle school and continue to develop and apply these skills in the high school years.

School survival skills help students learn how to

- study
- take notes
- get more from lectures
- find information for assignments
- take tests
- get organized
- manage time
- set goals
- follow rules (written and unwritten)
- speak up for themselves

These skills may be taught in a separate class such as Learning Strategies or included as part of ESE, vocational, or regular education classes. Programs in school survival skills may also be available through private tutors.

Planning for Graduation in the High School Years

During the high school years there are specific steps to take along the road to graduation. Your son or daughter should continue to develop and apply self-determination and school survival skills and explore career options. The diploma choice made in eighth grade will be reviewed annually.

In addition, *each year* in high school, your child needs to do the following with help from parents, teachers, counselors, or other school staff:

- Update the contents of the high school planning folder started in eighth grade. This should be done at the beginning and end of each year. Plan, revise, or document information, including
  - courses taken each year
  - career-related experiences
  - extracurricular activities
  - community activities
  - awards and special recognition
  - assessment records
- Enroll in the courses required for the selected diploma option.
- Check his or her grade point average and credits earned towards graduation. Consider retaking courses with low grades (D) to bring up GPA. (Note: Districts have different policies for retaking courses. The guidance counselor or teachers can provide more information about this process.)
- Enroll in summer school if necessary.

Beginning at the transition IEP meeting held during the year the student turns 16 (or earlier if needed), the transition IEP team must address the types of services the student may need in a variety of areas to help make the transition to adult life after high school. These areas include

- instruction
- community experiences
- development of employment and other post-school adult living skills
- related services as needed

Depending on the particular student, the team may also address the development of daily living skills or arrange for a functional vocational evaluation, if needed.

The transition IEP team will also help identify agencies that can provide services for your child after high school, if needed. Personnel from these service agencies will be invited to attend the transition IEP meeting. The transition IEP team will help you understand the steps you and your child must take to receive agency services. (*Transition: The IDEA Way—Agency Guide* provides more in-depth information on transition services. See "Appendix F: Resources" on page 45 for ordering information.)

As your child moves through the high school years, other necessary steps to graduation will depend on the diploma option your son or daughter is pursuing. The chart on the next page provides a brief summary of additional steps students should take in the last two years of high school to earn each type of diploma.

Steps to Your Diploma in the Last Two Years of High School*

(*Note: The steps below should be taken in addition to the other ongoing steps described in this section for every year of high school.)

Diploma	Next-to-Last Year of School	Last Year of School
Standard Diploma	• Take the High School Competency Test (HSCT), if needed. • Take the SAT or ACT if applying to colleges or universities. • Explore vocational schools, colleges, and universities that offer programs of interest. • Begin process of referral for agency assistance, if appropriate. (Note: This may occur at an earlier time if needed.)	• Make a final graduation credit and GPA check. • Retake the HSCT or FCAT if did not achieve passing score** • Retake the SAT or ACT if desired. • Visit vocational schools, colleges, or universities of interest. • Apply for admission and financial aid to vocational schools, colleges, and universities. • Make plans for post-school living arrangements if other than at home with parents. • Consider summer employment for extra money in postsecondary school. • Start job search.
Special Diploma Option 1	• Begin process of referral for agency assistance, if appropriate. (Note: This may occur at an earlier time if needed.) • Explore postsecondary education opportunities (special programs at vocational schools or community colleges, adult education programs, and private training programs).	• Make a check of final graduation requirements. • Check to be sure that all Student Performance Standards for student's exceptionality or Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma have been mastered. • Apply for admission to postsecondary education programs (special programs at vocational schools or community colleges, adult education programs, and private training programs). • Follow up on agency referrals if needed. • Start job search.
Special Diploma Option 2	• Begin process of referral for agency assistance, if appropriate. (Note: This may occur at an earlier time if needed.)	• Get a job if you don't have one already. • Keep a job, with good evaluations. • Show mastery of employment and community competencies. • Complete mastery of transition IEP goals related to employment and community living.

** For students entering high school as freshmen in the year 1999-2000 the FCAT will replace the HSCT. Students in 10th grade in the year 1999-2000 may be exempt from taking the HSCT (one or both parts) if they achieve the required scores on the FCAT.

Part 4: A Note about the Future

Change occurs in almost all areas of our lives, and education is no exception. The information in this guide is accurate as of Spring 1999 and for the foreseeable future.

Staying Informed of Changes

It's important to stay informed of changes that are occurring regarding diploma requirements. Discuss the changes with your child's teachers or guidance counselor. As mentioned previously, two important changes are planned for the near future.

The following changes apply to students entering high school as freshmen in the year 1999-2000 and after:

- The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) will replace the High School Competency Test (HSCT). Students will be required to pass the FCAT to meet graduation requirements for a standard diploma.
- The *Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma* will replace the *Student Performance Standards* currently required for students with disabilities who are working toward Special Diploma Option 1. The new standards are designed to prepare students for post-school employment and community participation.
- The state credit requirements for a standard diploma will change. Students will be required to complete 15.5 hours in required credits and 8.5 hours in elective credits.

Planning for the Future

There are three things parents and students can do to plan for the future.

1. Use the information available now to make the best possible choices.
2. Stay informed about changes so that when they take place you will have prepared for them.
3. Let your voice be heard in your son or daughter's school about the graduation requirements and other transition-related issues. The transition from high school to adult life is a wonderful but sometimes difficult time for all young people. It is often even more challenging for those with disabilities. Because of this, they are entitled to special help to make this transition successfully.

You now have information that you can use in deciding which path your child should take toward graduation. The next step is to work with teachers, other family members, community members, and especially your son or daughter to make sure he or she works toward a diploma that will lead to a productive and fulfilling adult life.

Appendices

Appendix A:	Current Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma
Appendix B:	Accommodations and Modifications
Appendix C:	The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma
Appendix D:	Acquiring a Diploma by Passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED)
Appendix E:	Samples of Rating Scales for Choosing between Diploma Options
Appendix F:	Resources

Appendix A:

Current Graduation Requirements for a Standard Diploma*

Students in all Florida public high schools must meet statewide requirements in order to graduate with a standard diploma. At a minimum, students must complete 24 academic credits in grades 9-12, pass both sections of the High School Competency Test (HSCT), and maintain a 2.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA) for courses taken since 1997-1998. These state requirements also require that the 24 course credits be distributed as follows:**

Credits Required	Subject Area
4	English, with major concentration in composition and literature
3	Mathematics, must include Algebra I, or its equivalent, or a higher level course
3	Science, two courses must include a laboratory component
1	American History
1	World History, comparative study of all major political systems
1/2	Economics, comparative study of all major economic systems
1/2	American Government, including study of U.S. Constitution, Florida government, and the structure of state and local government
1	Practical Arts/Exploratory Career Education, or Performing Arts (or 1/2 credit in each) Note: Selected ESE vocational courses may be used.
1/2	Life Management Skills
1/2	Physical Education
9	Electives

* *Note:* From High School Graduation Requirements, *Florida Information Note (p. 1)*, by Florida Department of Education, Office of Education Information and Accountability Services, January 1999, Tallahassee, FL: Author. Copyright 1999 by State of Florida. Adapted with permission.

** For students entering as freshman in 1999-2000 the course-credit requirements will change. Students will be required to complete 15.5 hours in required credits and 8.5 hours in elective credits.

Appendix B:

Accommodations and Modifications*

Students with disabilities often need *accommodations* and *modifications* to participate successfully in basic or vocational courses in regular classrooms. Accommodations change the *way* students learn. Modifications change the expectations for *what* students learn.

Accommodations for Courses

Examples of accommodations for courses are listed below. These accommodations can be used at any grade.

What Is Accommodated?	Examples of Changes that May be Made
Teaching methods or materials	◆ *Use hands-on activities.* ◆ *Use PASS materials to supplement English I materials.* ◆ *Use manipulatives to solve math problems.*
Assignments or assessments	◆ *Give student copies of lecture notes and overheads.* ◆ *Use a checklist for each step of procedure.* ◆ *Have science test read to student.*
Learning environment	◆ *Use a study carrel for independent work.* ◆ *Use adapted workstation for wheelchair.*
Time demands and schedules	◆ *Allow additional time to complete assignments.* ◆ *Limit independent work sessions to 20 minutes.*

The IEP identifies the accommodations and modifications needed by the student to participate in regular education classes. It also indicates the *supplementary aids and services* needed by the student. The aids and services may include assistive technology, such as special materials and equipment, use of special communication systems, and any services and supports that are needed.

Modification of Course Requirements for Regular Education Courses

There are specific guidelines for modification of regular education courses (changing the expectations for what students will learn in a course). *Basic courses* are academic courses, such as English I or World History. *Vocational courses* are

courses that prepare a student for a career he or she has selected (such as Drafting or Automotive Mechanics). Students may take basic or vocational courses in regular education classrooms to earn credit toward graduation. The transition IEP team makes decisions about what modifications may be needed.

Modifications to Basic Education Courses

For students earning a standard diploma, course requirements for basic courses (regular academic courses) *may not* be changed. Students with disabilities are expected to meet the same requirements as nondisabled students.

If the requirements for a basic course have been modified in high school, the credit *may not be used* to meet graduation requirements for a standard diploma. However, the credit *can* be used to meet graduation requirements for a special diploma.

Modifications to Vocational Education Courses

In contrast, vocational programs and course requirements *may be modified* (changed) as long as the changes are aimed at preparing the student for the job he or she has selected. Credit earned may be used to meet graduation requirements for a standard or a special diploma.

For example, the vocational program may be designed to train diesel engine mechanics. However, the student may want to be trained to work as an assistant to the mechanic. The performance standards for the job of diesel engine mechanic's assistant should be documented on the student's transition IEP.

Accommodations for Assessments

Determination of appropriate accommodations in assessment situations for students with disabilities is based on the individual needs of each student. The types of accommodations that are allowed are specified by the Florida Department of Education. The transition IEP team makes the decision regarding necessary accommodations.

The general expectation of state and districtwide assessment programs is that all students will participate in assessments for accountability purposes. Students with disabilities must be afforded the appropriate accommodations for assessment procedures as allowed for the individual test.

Students with disabilities may be provided accommodations for state tests such as FCAT, Florida Writes, and HSCT. These accommodations may also be allowed for district, school, or classroom assessments. Examples of possible accommodations are included in the chart on the following page.

Accommodations for Assessments

Type of Accommodation	Examples
Flexible format	◆ *Use braille or large print versions.* ◆ *Have directions for tests read outloud.*
Flexible response	◆ *Mark answers directly in test booklets.* ◆ *Dictate responses to proctor.*
Flexible schedule	◆ *Take tests in short time periods.* ◆ *Have additional time to complete tests.*
Flexible setting	◆ *Take tests individually.* ◆ *Take tests in small group setting.*

Participation in Testing

The transition IEP team decides whether a student with disabilities should participate in state and districtwide testing programs. This decision should be guided by past performance of the student, consideration of the desired school or post-school outcomes, and curriculum and instructional goals for the student. The team should also consider whether the student is working towards a standard diploma or a special diploma. Students planning to seek a standard diploma should participate in district and state testing beginning in elementary school.

Students who require a modified or specialized curriculum as specified in the transition IEP are sometimes not required to participate in state and districtwide assessments. However, if they do not participate in state or districtwide assessments, students must be provided an alternate assessment procedure to measure their achievement.

(**Note*: Information in this appendix is adapted from *Developing Quality Individual Educational Plans, Rev. ed. 1999*, Florida Department of Education, in progress, Tallahassee, FL: Author).

Appendix C:

The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma*

The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma are designed to prepare students for adult living and employment after graduation. These special standards have been developed to include modifications to curriculum requirements. The standards are required for Special Diploma Option 1 for students with disabilities entering the ninth grade in the year 1999-2000 and later.

The domains and strands of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma are briefly described in the chart below.

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS FOR SPECIAL DIPLOMA

Domains (Areas)	Strands (Topics Addressed in Each Domain)
Curriculum and Learning Environment	◆ *Strand A: The Sunshine State Standards* Addresses the student's progress toward achieving the Sunshine State Standards with modifications. ◆ *Strand B: Functional Academics* Includes functional skills in the areas of reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, mathematics, and problem solving. ◆ *Strand C: Life Work* Addresses workplace competencies relating to job preparation, task management, use of tools and technology, and employability skills.
Independent Functioning	◆ *Strand A: Personal Care* Includes the skills and knowledge associated with personal daily living and care, and accessing community resources. ◆ *Strand B: Self-Management* Includes personal planning and decision making, as well as appropriate conduct in daily living and work roles.
Social and Emotional Behavior	◆ *Strand A: Working with Others* Focuses on working in groups and developing interpersonal relationships.
Communication	◆ *Strand A: Communicating with Others* Addresses the ability to participate effectively in initiating and responding to communication.

For each strand, standards and benchmarks describe what students are expected to know and be able to do. A student with disabilities is expected to master *each* standard at a level of functioning that is appropriate for the individual student. The transition IEP team will determine these expectations for your son or daughter. The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma have benchmarks at three levels of functioning.

- *Independent*–Students at this level are expected to be able to perform the behaviors for each benchmark on their own.
- *Supported*–Students at this level are expected to require ongoing use of assistive aids, prompting, or supervision in order to perform the behaviors for each benchmark.
- *Participatory*–Students at this level are expected to require extensive assistance to be able to participate in activities of daily living as indicated in the benchmarks.

**Note*: From *The Florida Sunshine State Standards and Students with Disabilities: What Parents Need to Know*, by Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services, 1999, Tallahassee, FL: Author. Copyright 1999 by State of Florida. Adapted with permission.

Appendix D:

Acquiring a Diploma by Passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED)

Students may obtain a Florida high school diploma by passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED). Accommodations can be provided for the GED tests for students with documented disabilities. Passing these tests enables people to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and skills usually acquired through four years of high school.

Several ways that a student might work towards that goal are described below.

- Students who leave high school without earning a standard diploma (including students who earn a special diploma or certificate of completion) may earn a Florida high school diploma by passing the GED tests. Students may attend classes offered through adult education to prepare for the GED tests.

- Students who leave high school without a standard diploma, and who are at least 18 years of age, *may* be granted provisional admission to a community college. They may be allowed to take up to 12 credit hours as nondegree-seeking students provided they pass the GED tests while they are enrolled.

- If a student is at risk of dropping out and is otherwise eligible for the school district's dropout prevention program, he or she may be able to work toward passing the GED tests.

Your school district may offer more options than the ones mentioned above. Call your local ESE or adult education contact person for further information about all the possible graduation options available to your son or daughter.

Pros and Cons of Earning a Diploma by Passing the GED Tests

A diploma earned by passing the GED tests is usually accepted by employers, community colleges, and vocational schools. It is recognized by military recruiters, as long as the applicant meets other requirements. However, some branches of the military may limit the number of persons accepted with this type of diploma. Keep in mind that the academic requirements of the GED tests may be challenging for some students.

Appendix E:

Samples of Rating Scales for Choosing between Diploma Options

This appendix contains samples of two rating scales that may be used to provide additional information to the IEP team for making diploma choices.

- **The "Student Profile for Choosing a Standard or Special Diploma Option"** on page 42 is an example of a tool that may be used to assist the transition IEP team in deciding whether a student should pursue a standard diploma or a special diploma. This form helps the team consider the student's level of functioning in five key areas–cognition, curriculum, social/emotional behavior, communication, and level of independence—in an effort to help make this important decision.

  Note: From "Student Profile for Standard/Special Diploma," by Palm Beach County School District, Exceptional Student Education Department, 1996, West Palm Beach, FL: Author. Adapted with permission.

- **"Guidelines for Choosing between Special Diploma Options 1 and 2"** on page 43 is an example of a tool that may help the IEP team in deciding between Special Diploma Option 1 and Special Diploma Option 2.

  Note: From "Guidelines for Choosing between Special Diploma Options," by Palm Beach County School District, Exceptional Student Education Department, 1996, West Palm Beach, FL: Author. Adapted with permission.

Student Profile for Choosing a Standard or Special Diploma Option*

Directions:

1. For each category, place a check in the box that best describes the level of functioning of the student.
2. Record the number of boxes checked in each level. Add totals to find A, B, and C as described below.

Category	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
COGNITION (IQ)	❑ Significantly below average	❑ Well below average	❑ Slightly below average	❑ Low average	❑ Average	❑ Above average
CURRICULUM	❑ Very different curriculum	❑ Modified curriculum; community-based instruction	❑ Regular curriculum taught in ESE setting	❑ Regular curriculum with accommodations by ESE staff	❑ Regular curriculum at or near grade level	❑ Regular curriculum above grade level
SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL	❑ Very poor personal adjustment and relationships; requires 1-1 assistance	❑ Poor personal adjustment and relationships; requires assistance in most settings	❑ Below average personal adjustment and relationships; requires behavioral contract	❑ Average personal adjustment and relationships	❑ Good personal adjustment and relationships	❑ Excellent personal adjustment and relationships
COMMUNICATION	❑ Uses gestures or vocalizations to communicate	❑ Has difficulty understanding and communicating with *most* people –using speech, sign language, or assistive communication device; no written communication	❑ Has difficulty communicating with *some* people–using speech, sign language, or assistive communication device; limited written communication	❑ Limited oral, signed, or written communication	❑ Expresses self well using speech or sign language; needs help with written communication	❑ Expresses self well through speaking and writing
INDEPENDENT FUNCTIONING	❑ Requires full-time personal assistant to care for personal needs and manage on-task behavior	❑ Requires much help with personal care; needs supervision to maintain acceptable behaviors in most situations	❑ Requires occasional help with personal care; needs prompting or supervision to stay on task; is reluctant to try new things	❑ Takes care of some personal needs; reliable and responsible in familiar situations; has difficulty dealing with new situations	❑ Takes care of most personal needs; generally reliable and responsible; hesitant to stand up for self	❑ Takes care of all personal needs; always reliable and responsible; can advocate for self
Total	Total Boxes Checked for Level 1 =	Total Boxes Checked for Level 2 =	Total Boxes Checked for Level 3 =	Total Boxes Checked for Level 4 =	Total Boxes Checked for Level 5 =	Total Boxes Checked for Level 6 =

A = (Total of Levels 1, 2, and 3) Special diploma should be considered if there are more boxes checked in A than B.

B = (Total of Levels 4, 5, and 6) Standard diploma should be considered if there are more boxes checked in B than A.

C = (Total of Level 3) Standard diploma should be considered if most boxes checked are in Level 3. Then monitor child's progress carefully.

*(This decision must be made by the **entire transition IEP team**, not by one individual.)

Guidelines for Choosing between Special Diploma Options 1 and 2

There are many things to consider when deciding which special diploma option your student should choose. Some of these are listed below. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. These are only **guidelines**, not the final answer.

Directions:

1. Place a check on the line beside the statement in each row that best describes how you view your child and his/her behavior.
2. Record the point value and then total up the points from all the rows.
3. Use the point guidelines at the bottom to assist you in making the decision.

STATEMENTS	POINTS A = 1 B = 2 C = 3
___ A. The student likes schoolwork (activities, materials, classes, homework, etc.). ___ B. The student does not like schoolwork. ___ C. The student refuses to do schoolwork.	
___ A. The student enjoys being in school with his or her friends. ___ B. The student does not enjoy being in school. ___ C. The student resists going to school.	
___ A. The student is not likely to drop out before graduating. ___ B. The student is very likely to drop out before graduating. ___ C. The student has already discussed wanting to drop out.	
___ A. The student has mastered most of his or her Student Performance Standards. ___ B. The student has mastered some of his or her Student Performance Standards. ___ C. The student has mastered few of his or her Student Performance Standards.	
___ A. The student has never worked and shows little interest in employment. ___ B. The student has some interest and experience in working. ___ C. The student has good work potential.	
___ A. The student will probably live in a group or congregate setting after high school. ___ B. The student will probably live with parents after high school. ___ C. The student will probably live on his or her own after high school.	
___ A. The student has few community skills. ___ B. The student gets around in the community fairly well. ___ C. The student gets around in the community very well.	
___ A. The student has many behavior problems. ___ B. The student has few behavior problems. ___ C. The student has no behavior problems.	
___ A. The student behaves better in school than out of school. ___ B. The student acts about the same whether in or out of school. ___ C. The student behaves better out of school than in school (and would probably behave well in a work-type setting).	

TOTAL POINTS = _____

9 - 17 = Special Diploma Option 1 may be the best choice for the student.
18 - 27 = Special Diploma Option 2 may be the best choice for the student.

Appendix F: Resources

The following resources are available through the Florida Department of Education's Clearinghouse Information Center, (850) 488-1879, Suite 628, Turlington Building, 325 West Gaines Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400.

- "Alternate Assessment" (pamphlet)
- *Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities*
- *Dare to Dream: A Guide to Planning Your Future (Student Guide* and *Teacher's Guide)*
- *Developing Quality Individual Educational Plans: A Guide for Instructional Personnel*
- *For Parents of Florida's Exceptional Students...*
- *GED/HSCT Exit Option Model*
- *Let's Try Another Way: A Guide to Implementing Special Diploma Option 2*
- *Postsecondary Education Support Services: A Guide for Students with Disabilities*
- "Testing Modifications for Students with Disabilities" (pamphlet)
- *Transition: The IDEA Way—Agency Guide*

The following resources are available through the Florida Department of Education Products Catalog. You may order them by calling 1-800-342-9271 or writing to Bureau of Program Management and Development, Division of Workforce Development, Florida Department of Education, Turlington Building, Room 644, 325 West Gaines Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400.

- *Career Cruiser*
- *Pathways to Your Future*
- *Florida Sunshine State Standards and Instructional Practices*

The following resources are available through the Florida Network. You may order them by calling 352-392-0701 (extension 291), by faxing your request to 352-392-2665, or by sending your request to Florida Network, University of Florida, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611-7050.

- *Community-Based Vocational Training*
- *Job Clubs and Vocational Student Organizations for Special Needs Students*
- *Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy for Students with Disabilities*
- *Note:* A Guide on Developing Quality Transition IEPs is expected to be available in the fall of 1999.

Resources Online

- Florida DOE Home Page (http://www.firn.edu/doe/doehome.htm)
- Florida DOE Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services Publications (http://www.firn.edu/doe/bin00014/pub-home.htm)

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ESE # 10521